

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

Students who do not wish to submit an MA thesis may, as an alternative, complete two further courses and take comprehensive exams consisting of a written exam and defense.

The purpose of comprehensive exams is to provide evidence of students' knowledge of the range of ideas and literature that comprise the field of Middle East studies. Comprehensive exams go beyond individual courses to test students' ability to integrate and analyze at a broad, general level. Material from courses will be an important part of the basis of many answers, but students are expected to prepare for comprehensive exams through substantial reading – beyond that required for their courses – in consultation with faculty advisors.

Comprehensive exams are taken after completing all other degree requirements, including Arabic proficiency. Students will choose three disciplines from the following list:

- Anthropology
- Arabic literature
- Economics
- History
- Law
- Political Science
- Sociology
- Gender and Women's Studies
- Migration and Refugee Studies
- Public Policy and Administration
- Middle East Studies

Process and Deadlines

Students will choose a faculty examiner from each relevant department or center, and obtain his/her agreement to serve in this capacity. The three advisors together form the student's exam committee. One member will serve as the chair of this committee.

Students should discuss with each committee member the range of ideas and literature that they are expected to master. Each advisor should prepare reading lists to cover all the topics in the written exam and should not include topics which the student has not already studied or had exposure to (through projects for example).

Each member of the examination committee will submit three questions in strict confidence to the chair of the exam committee. The committee chair is responsible for ensuring that the combined questions cover a broad range of Middle East studies and will choose two questions submitted by each advisor to achieve this objective. S/he will, if necessary, ask the examination committee members to submit alternative questions.

The MESC secretariat provides a form outlining acceptance from each member of the comprehensive exams committee to be involved. Both forms are available on the MESC website (under the 'Academics' tab) at:

<https://gapp.aucegypt.edu/centers/mesc/thesis-requirement-preparation>

This form must be completed in full (i.e. signed by all members of the committee) and submitted to the MESC administrator before the end of the advising period (Spring semester).

Written Exam

Students will take the written comprehensive exam in a single, three-hour session and answer three questions - one question (out of two) - from each chosen discipline. The relevant committee member will grade each answer (using a numeric and alphabetical grade with the usual pluses and minuses) and submit the grades to the committee chair. The minimum passing **average grade is B**. Only then may the student be permitted to advance to the oral examination.

**For those students who received less than a B average, they will be required to retake the questions on which they scored a score below B at the next available opportunity.

For students who fail the comprehensive written exam, they may take another comprehensive exam during the following semester with new questions (for all those responses which received lower than a B). The questions will be based on the same topics and readings. The student may not change either the discipline(s) to be re-examined, or the faculty advisors. Where necessary, the exam committee, in consultation with the director of MESC may appoint a new member to replace an examiner who is not available for the re-examination.

N.B. COMPS exams must take place before the end of the spring semester to be in conformity with grading submission deadlines at the end of the semester.

There is no grace period.

Oral Exam

After a student passes the written exam the examination committee and the student will convene for a half-hour oral examination. For students who received B average or better in the written exam, the oral exam provides an opportunity for the committee to allow students to clarify or amplify their written answers and have a general discussion.

Final Grade

Immediately following the oral examination, the committee chair will convene the committee to average the grades for the written exam, assess the student's oral performance, and award a final grade of "Pass with Honors," "Pass," or "Fail."